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NEWS

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ANCHORAGE -- The Alaska Board of Game has reconsidered its spring decision to open the Skilak Loop Wildlife Management area to the use of firearms for taking small game.

Last week the board held an emergency teleconference and, in the face of strenuous objections from the federal government, decided to hold off on any changes for two years.

The management area on the Kenai Peninsula is in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. For more than a decade, small gaming hunting has been open Oct. 1-March 1 by archery only.

The area consists of that portion between the Sterling Highway and Skilak Lake with the lake access road forming the eastern and western boundaries. Wildlife viewing is the primary focus of the management area, although moose hunting is allowed by drawing permits when moose numbers reach certain levels.

Last spring, the board reviewed all of the special management areas throughout Southcentral Alaska to determine whether they still were meeting the purposes for which they were designated. The board concluded allowing the use of firearms for small game and furbearers would not significantly impact wildlife viewing.

Most of the small game hunting in the area is for snowshoe hares and grouse during the late fall and winter. Most of the wildlife viewing activity is directed at moose and bears during summer months.

Federal refuge managers objected to the change, and initiated federal rule-making to address board action.

As a result of the board's latest decision, hunting of small game Oct. 1-March 1 will continue to be by archery only in the Skilak Loop Management Area.

In addition the Kenai Refuge will initiate a planning process to review the management objectives of the Skilak area. The public is encouraged to participate in this process this winter.

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